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A

SERMON

PREACH'D to the

SOCIETIES

FOR

Reformation of Manners,

AT

SALTERS-HALL;

On MONDAY *June* 26. 1721.

By *JOHN BARKER.*

PUBLISH'D at their REQUEST.

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Job xxii. 30.

He shall deliver the Island of the Innocent: and it is delivered by the Pureness of thy Hands.

THE Book of *Job* is intended to present us with a most illustrious Example of sincere Piety in great Prosperity, and eminent Patience under great Adversity. The Piety of *Job* was so well tried that God himself pronounces him *a perfect and upright Man*; and his Patience being largely prov'd by a surprizing Variety of uncommon Calamities, is declared great and exemplary, by an inspired Apostle. The great and sudden Change which befel this eminent Person, was no doubt matter of general Observation, and soon reach'd his Friends in particular, who being Persons of Distinction thought themselves bound by the Laws of Religion and Civility forthwith to visit him: The first sight they had of *Job* struck them into the Posture of Mourners,

Chap. i. 8.

Jam. v. 11.

they beheld their Friend with Grief and Surprize, and like Men confounded at so miserable a Spectacle, they sat them down without speaking, and spent several Days in silent Condolance.

Ch. ii. 12, 13.

The first who brake the Silence was *Job*, and he does it, as well he might, in the bitterness of his Spirit, making most passionate Complaints of the Miseries of humane Life. To this *Eliphaz*, one of his Friends, replies, but in a manner very different from what might have been expected from a Person of his Religion, Wisdom, and Quality; all his Pity ended with his Silence, and instead of that soft Answer which *Job*'s Anguish seemed to require, he speaks as one incensed at his Complaint, and uses a sharp unseasonable Rebuke, instead of a gentle and tender Sympathy. *Eliphaz*'s Opinion seems to be this, That *Job* could never *be* the good Man he had appeared, because of the prodigious Misery now upon him. Suspecting *Job*'s Character, therefore he changes his own, and seems to think it his Business to reprove a Criminal, rather than to comfort a pious Mourner: *Thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthned the weak Hands. Thy Words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthned the feeble Knees: But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled. Is not this thy Fear, thy Confidence, thy Hope, and the Uprightness of thy Ways? Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished being innocent? or where were the Righteous cut off?* They are plainly Words of Accusation and Reproach.

Chap. iv. 3—7.

And now begins a Dispute between *Job* and his Friends, they all accusing him of Hy-

pocriſy, and he vindicating his own Sincerity. The Diſpute between him and *Eliphaz* begins Chap. iv^th^, is renewed in the xv^th^, and carried on in *this*, and concluded on the part of the Opponent, with the words of my Text. *Eliphaz*, far from yielding to righteous *Job*, ſtill maintains, that God would never have puniſh'd him in ſuch a ſevere manner, if he had not been an ill Man; and (as is too common even with good Men) in the progreſs of the Diſpute, grew more fierce in his Temper, and more warm in his Expreſſions; yet being willing to cloſe the Debate with ſome Moderation, he invites *Job* to Repentance, and ſhews him the happy Fruits hereof: Would he repent, he tells him, he ſhould be freed from all his Calamities, enjoy a great deal of Good himſelf, and be the Inſtrument of much Good to others; *If thou return to the Almighty, thou ſhalt be built up; thou ſhalt put away Iniquity far from thy Tabernacle. Thou ſhalt have thy Delight in the Almighty, thou ſhalt lift up thy Face unto God: He ſhall ſave the humble Perſon*; "and "to finiſh all, thy Goodneſs ſhall extend to "all around thee; thy Repentance ſhall be "the Advantage of others; many ſhall reap "the Fruits of it." *He ſhall deliver the Iſland of the Innocent, and it is delivered by the Pureneſs of thy Hands.* V. 23*d* and onwards.

It ſhould ſeem, that *Eliphaz* intends to inſinuate here, that *Job* did not pray with that Purity he pretended, becauſe his Prayers, far from availing for others, at a diſtance, did not do it for himſelf, and his Children; but though he were miſtaken in the Application, his Doctrine was doubtleſs good, *viz.* that the Safety

of

of many is often owing to the Prayers of a few; nay that one good Man ſtanding in the Breach, may effectually plead with God for many wicked; if this be the Senſe of the Words, they will not be improper to the Occaſion now before us: Thus improv'd the Text will afford both Direction and Comfort to the Friends of God, and the Lovers of Prayer; and how few ſoever aſſociate to reform, and ſave a Nation, and how many ſoever the Difficulties they meet with may be, yet their Hearts being right with God, and their Supplications and Interceſſions ſincere, fervent and continual, God himſelf will be pleas'd with their Addreſs, and the whole Iſland ſhall happily ſee and feel the vaſt Advantage of a few good People's Intereſt in Heaven.

That ſomething near to this is the Senſe of the Text, may perhaps appear from the following Explication of it.

If we take the Words as they ſtand in our Bibles, *Eliphaz* muſt be underſtood thus. "He "whoſe Prerogative it is to ſave; God, who al- "ways can do it, who is much inclin'd to Mercy, "and who has great Reſpect to good Men, "and even delights in the Prayers of his Peo- "ple; will, at thy Requeſt, deliver *the Iſland*, "or, the whole Country round about thee: The word *Iſle* or *Iſland*, not being taken ſtrictly for ſuch Lands as were ſeparated from *Canaan* by the Sea, but for ſuch as were upon the ſame *Continent*: And *it*, (i.e.) the *Iſland*, or *Country*, *is*, or *ſhall*, or, *will be*, *delivered by the Pureneſs of thy Hands*.

But the Words may be differently rendred. The marginal reading is, *The Innocent ſhall deliver the Iſland*: And to this ſome the rather incline, becauſe an innocent Nation have no ſuch

ſuch need of Advocates, and the Interceſſion of others for their Deliverance: Were a Country generally innocent, (*i. e.*) prevailingly virtuous and good, this would be their great Protection; God would not enter into Judgment with ſuch a Society, ſevere Diſpleaſure would not be ſhewn to ſuch a People, nor any Wrath drawn down from Heaven upon them, ſuch as to call for the loud Interceſſion of others in their Favour. But here, one is ready to ſay, Where is this happy People to be found? Where is that *Fortunate Iſland*, which can in any proper Senſe be call'd the *Iſland* of the *Innocent?* Our own, I fear, is far from deſerving this Character. Our Mercies indeed are many, and our Advantages above other Nations not a few; our Situation and Climate, our Soil and Air, our Fruits and Manufactures, the Number and Temper of our Inhabitants, and the vaſt Extent (at leaſt till very lately) of our Credit, Wealth, and Power; above all, our Religion and Liberty have highly exalted our Nation, and made it *the Joy and the Praiſe of the whole Earth.* But alas! our Sins alſo are but too viſible; our Abuſe of Mercy very great, and our Diſobedience and Perverſeneſs very provoking. Our Iniquities are indeed more and greater than any thing, and every thing elſe, except it be the Patience, and Mercies of our gracious God; the Sun, whoſe Beams viſit and revive us, beholds our aſtoniſhing Guilt, and is a Witneſs that ours are not Deeds of Midnight Darkneſs only, but Sins in open Light; the Earth groans, being burdened with Loads of Guilt, heavier far than its numerous Inhabitants; the Air in which we breathe is infected with Oaths and Blaſphemies, with filthy Converſa-

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tion, and polluted Breath, so that one is ready to wonder God does not mingle pestilential Infection with it, and shoot the Arrows of his fiercest Wrath amongst us; surely there are some innocent Persons who deliver the Island, some pious, praying, Heaven-born Souls who preserve it; happy is it for us, that these do not wholly fail and cease amongst us; God increase their Number, and Crown their Zeal and Charity with great Success!

But because the word here rendred *Island*, is sometimes used for *not* in Scripture, some have thought the most probable Sense of the Text to be this: *He shall deliver him that is not Innocent*, (i.e.) the good Man shall deliver the guilty, or God at the Request of a good Man will deliver him that is not good; and *it*, or *he*, (i.e.) the guilty Person *is*, or *shall be delivered by the Pureness of Hands*. Which last Expression, *Pureness of Hands*, may be taken either for Freedom from Corruption and Bribery, like that of the Prophet; *He that despiseth the Gain of Oppression, that shaketh his Hands from holding of Bribes*: or else for devout Prayer, like that of the Apostle; *I will that Men pray every where, lifting up holy Hands*; or more largely still for true and sincere Piety: so the Man who is free from Hypocrisy, and of holy unblameable Conversation, is describ'd by the Psalmist, as one *who has clean Hands and a pure Heart*.

Isai. xxxiii. 15.

1 Tim. ii. 8.

Psal. xxiv. 4.

Which of these ways soever the words are explain'd, they plainly put an Honour upon Piety and Prayer, and serve to shew us, that holy Men are a publick Good, and a very great Blessing to humane Society, and that even a few such Persons are a Nation's best, and great-

eſt Treaſure ; and this leads me to the following Doctrine.

Doct. THAT the Piety and Virtue of a few righteous Perſons, may be a great means of preſerving and delivering a ſinful and threatned Nation.

Meth. THE Method I ſhall obſerve in ſpeaking to this Doctrine is this:

1. I will enquire, What that Piety and Virtue is, which will probably preſerve, and deliver a ſinful and threatned Nation?

2. HOW this appears a proper means of ſo great and good an End?

3. WHAT is the uſe to be made of ſuch a Subject, at this time?

1. WHAT is that Piety and Virtue, which will probably preſerve and deliver a ſinful and threatned Nation?

IN Anſwer to this Enquiry, I think it proper to obſerve, that by Piety I underſtand the Duties, which more directly and immediately refer to God ; and by Virtue thoſe which reſpect our ſelves, and our fellow Creatures; the difference between theſe two lies in the Object; and tho' I think we may allowably diſtinguiſh, I readily own, we may not by any means ſeparate them one from the other : Piety and Virtue, or in the Language of Inſpiration, *Godlineſs* and *Honeſty*, *a Conſcience void of Offence towards God and Man* ; are but Parts of the ſame Religion, which is taught us in the ſacred Scriptures, and exemplified in the Life of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST : The Word of GOD is the Rule both of perſonal and ſocial Virtue, as well as of true and genuine Piety ; both likewiſe muſt have Reſpect to the Mediator, if good and acceptable in the

ſight of GOD; and reſult from the Operation of the holy and bleſſed Spirit upon our Souls: This only exalts Heathen Morality into Chriſtian Virtue, and makes that Sobriety and Purity we owe to our ſelves, and that Honeſty, Moderation and Charity, which is due to others, really to deſerve the Name of Goodneſs: Then only ſhall we *Cleanſe our ſelves from all Filthineſs, both of Fleſh and Spirit, be found in Peace, without Spot, and Blameleſs*; then ſhall we *love our Neighbour as our ſelves, provide things honeſt in the ſight of all Men*, be chaſte and temperate, juſt and righteous, charitable and uſeful, *not overcome with Evil, but able to overcome Evil with Good*; when the Fear and Love of GOD rules in our Hearts, as a governing Principle; and when *we are juſtified, waſh'd and ſanctified in the Name of the Lord* JESUS, *and by the Spirit of our* GOD. Nothing is more certain, than that all Vice is contrary to the Principles of univerſal Reaſon, and Virtue only conſonant and agreeable hereunto; and I think it equally certain that then only is Reaſon an effectual Motive to the one, and a certain Reſtraint from the other, when it is aſſiſted by the Word, and ſanctified by the Spirit of GOD: Without this, Men are good as it were by accident, and at beſt but in part only; and if ſome be leſs vicious, and others more honeſt and uſeful, it is but as their preſent Intereſt, Inclination, or Opportunities lead them; he only is really and thoroughly virtuous, whoſe Heart is pure, and whoſe Hands are clean, and in whom the Love of Sin is in ſome good Meaſure conquered, as well as the Practice of it reſtrain'd by the Word and Spirit of GOD; when we are told expreſly, that *without Faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe* GOD;

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we may be very ſure, that however Men may boaſt of their Honeſty and Honour, and how high ſoever their Pretences to them may run; yet if they leave out *this*, it cannot be call'd Chriſtian Virtue; nor will it be always ſteddy and inflexible, Intereſt and Temptation will make it warp, and yield, and the Superſtructure rais'd upon this, will be ever unſafe, becauſe the Foundation on which it relies is weak and treacherous.

THUS much I thought proper to ſay in the general, concerning the Piety and Virtue, which may probably preſerve and deliver a ſinful and threatned Nation; it may be farther illuſtrated, by being ſet in oppoſition to that Impiety and Vice, which threatens a general Ruin.

AND here we muſt begin with Atheiſm and Infidelity. When Men arrive at ſo great a degree of Stupidity, as to ſay there is no GOD, or believing his Exiſtence (which indeed it is hardly poſſible wholly to deny) they will yet prophane his Sabbaths, and pollute his Sanctuary; when People become ſo bold and daring, as to inſult thoſe Doctrines which are according to Godlineſs, and deride ſuch as profeſs, aſſert and vindicate them; when they are ſo impious and hardned, as to blaſpheme that great and dreadful Name the Lord our GOD; and not only not worſhip and glorifie the GOD of their Lives, in whoſe Hands their Breath is, but contemn his Authority, and violate his Laws, and without Fear or Shame, ſet their Faces againſt Heaven, provoking and defying Almighty Power, and Sin-avenging Wrath; when divine Precepts ſtrike no Awe upon Men's Spirits, and the moſt tremendous Threatnings of

God's Word affect them not; when the Foundations of Piety are destroy'd, and every sacred Fence which Religion sets about the Throne of God, is thrown down and trampled under the Feet of Men; what is likely to follow but common Calamity, and general Ruin? Especially when hereupon all Iniquity abounds, and every Vice of depraved Nature is gratify'd, and abandon'd Sinners govern themselves by nothing but sensual Lusts and brutish Passions? when prophane Cursing and Swearing is heard almost in every Place, and Men are so very wicked as to damn themselves and one another in Jest and Sport; when Gluttony and Drunkenness, Debauchery and Lewdness, Sensuality, and every kind of Excess becomes general, in spite of the Laws both of God and Man; when the Voice of Reason and Religion is disregarded, and Conscience and Conviction is restrain'd and stifled; when Sin is made bold by its Numbers, the Reins thrown upon the Neck of Lust, and Vice rowls on like a swelling Torrent, whose proud Waves are not to be stemm'd and resisted, and the generality act as if there were no difference between Good and Evil, between *him that feareth* God, *and him that feareth him not*; what is there in such a miserable State of Things that we may not fear? What smart Strokes of Affliction, heavy Wrath, and severe Judgments of God, may we suppose likely to follow such daring and triumphant Wickedness as this? Finally, when the Bands of Society are broken by Pride and Covetousness, Perjury and Falsehood, Oppression and Cruelty; when Men are false to one another, as they are disobedient to God, and the Vices which naturally tend to dissolve Society, are practis'd

practis'd by all the Ranks of those that constitute it; when the Rich indulge to Excess, and the Poor to Idleness and Sloth; when People are selfish and narrow spirited, seeking greedily whatever they can get, and looking upon all about them with an evil Eye; when they are clamorous and discontented, and by one another's Murmurs and Complaints, prepar'd to take Vengeance even of any thing, except of themselves, and their Sins; these are the things which defile a Nation, expose it to the Wrath of GOD, and threaten it with fearful Judgments and speedy Ruin.

THE Piety and Virtue which alone can remedy this Evil, will now appear to be this:

1. A true and becoming Fear of GOD.

A due Veneration for his Majesty and Authority, his Attributes and Laws, his Truths and Ways and People; a sincere Desire of his Favour, and a Dread of his Displeasure and Wrath; sincere and continual Prayer to GOD, and a devout and regular Attendance upon all the Parts of his instituted Worship; a Concern to obtain from him the several Blessings of Life, and Religion thro' the powerful Interest of the great Mediator, and that he may be appeas'd and pacify'd by the Blood and Merit of his blessed Son, and prevail'd upon to hear our humble Prayer, *not to cast us away from his Presence, nor to turn away his holy Spirit from Us:* When Men of Power and Interest set themselves, and stir up others, to invocate the God of Heaven, and shew Concern for the Recovery of his Fear and Honour in the Nation; bear their Testimony against all Impiety, and shew a becoming Zeal for all that, by which GOD makes himself known, this is that *Blessing of the Upright*

by

by which the City is preſerved; and which the wiſe Man oppoſes to *the Mouth of the Wicked by which it is overthrown.* Prov. ix. 11. Add to this,

2. THE Exerciſe of perſonal Virtue.

SOBRIETY, for inſtance, and Purity of Heart and Life, or the Subjection of our Appetites and Paſſions, to the Conduct and Direction of Reaſon and Religion; Temperance and Chaſtity, Meekneſs and Modeſty, Patience, Contentment and Command of Temper, in Oppoſition to the Impiety of the Swearer, the Debauchery of the Drunkard, the Filthineſs of the Unclean, the Paſſion of the Wrathful, the Perjury of the Falſe and Treacherous, and the great Uneaſineſs of the Fretful, the Envious and the Diſcontented: Thus the Apoſtle in his Advices to the Chriſtians at *Philippi*, exhorts them to imitate every commendable Thing they obſerved even in their Heathen Neighbours, *Whatſoever Things are true, whatſoever Things are honeſt, whatſoever Things are juſt, whatſoever Things are pure, whatſoever Things are lovely, whatſoever Things are of good Report*; or, if there be any thing elſe juſtly to be eſteem'd virtuous, or deſerving Praiſe, think on theſe Things, and he adds afterwards, *the God of Peace ſhall be with you.* Philip. iv. 8.

3. THE Practice of all ſocial Virtue.

SUCH as Juſtice and Righteouſneſs, Faith and Truth, Charity and Mercy, Peace and Concord, Submiſſion and Obedience to our Superiors, and Courteſy, Affability and Love to our Inferiors and Equals; theſe and ſuch like Virtues ſtrengthen the Bands of Society, unite the Members of it in one common Intereſt, re-

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pair the disordered Foundations, will strengthen all the Parts, and give Order, Beauty and Life to the whole.

And this brings me to enquire,

2. How it appears that Piety and Virtue is a proper Means to this good End, the preserving and delivering a sinful and threatned Nation?

And to this I answer, It is a natural, and it is an instituted Means.

1. It is a natural Means.

Righteousness exalteth a Nation, but Sin is a Reproach to any People. The one naturally advances it to Honour, the other unavoidably brings it to Contempt. Piety and Virtue seem to have the same Influence upon the Political Body, that Temperance and Exercise have upon the Natural One; they preserve it from Distemper, and increase its Strength. This not only appears in Fact, but may, I think, be accounted for by the plain Reason of Things: True Piety makes Men just and generous, sober and temperate, grave and good; and Christian Virtue emboldens the Mind, and elevates the Soul above Things base and vile, false and treacherous, unjust and cruel. *He who sets the Lord always before him, will walk uprightly, and work Righteousness, and speak the Truth in his Heart; he will do no Evil to his Neighbour*, in his Person, Reputation or Estate; he will be a Man of Probity and Truth; you may rely on his Word, and be secure of his Faith; and should he *swear to his own Hurt, he will not change.* He is not to be threatned out of his Virtue, nor bribed into the Practice of Vice; he has nothing to hope, or fear, so much as the Favour, or Anger of God; and has no Pleasure so great as the Friendship of Heaven, Prov. xiv. 34.

Heaven, and the Peace of his Conſcience; nor any Pain ſo bitter, as inward Anguiſh, and GOD's Diſpleaſure. It is therefore eaſy to apprehend, that did ſuch Perſons conſtitute, and ſuch Principles as theſe adorn Society, it muſt needs be proſperous and happy. Who ſees not the evident Connection between the Love of GOD, and that of our Neighbour; true Piety, and the Good of Mankind; the Practice of Religion, and the Love of Liberty; the Service of GOD, and that of our Generation? Let Men be chaſte and temperate, and they will be brave and honeſt: Make them induſtrious and frugal, and you make them rich and thriving; and as they grow into the Love of Liberty, Moderation and Charity, they will be good Subjects, quiet Neighbours, and ſincere and hearty Friends. Whereas Impiety and Vice is the Bane of all that is good, and the Source of all that is evil: An ill Man is baſe and treacherous, timorous and ungrateful, oppreſſive and cruel; being falſe to GOD and himſelf, he is ſo to his Neighbour, and therefore incapable of Love and Friendſhip, becauſe vicious and debauched. Luſt is ſuch an unruly, impetuous Thing, that nothing juſt, or dear, or ſacred will reſtrain it: You can have no Dependance on a Man who acts upon ſuch Principles, only as he is afraid or aſhamed to own; the very Actions which load him with Guilt, put him upon others worſe and more vile, in order to conceal his Shame, or eſcape Puniſhment: And if this vicious Temper becomes popular and unreſtrained, enters into the ſeveral Branches of Society, and makes the Infection general, it will blaſt like Lightning, and conſume like a Peſtilence; every good Thing will wither and die away, and all

that

that is Evil grow up in its ſtead: Increaſing Guilt always makes way for abounding Miſery, and there is as natural a Connection between thoſe two, as between the Darkneſs, and the Damps of Night. Impiety naturally tends to Inhumanity; a Contempt of GOD, to a Careleſſneſs of our ſelves and others; and a Defiance of the divine Laws, to that of the beſt and wiſeſt Laws of Men; profane Swearing tends to Perjury; Drunkenneſs and Uncleanneſs, to Idleneſs, Want and Beggary; Pride and Covetouſneſs, leads Men to Gaming, and other unjuſt and diſhoneſt Gain; and Luxury and Exceſs, expoſes them to the Temptation of Bribery, and *taking a Reward* even *againſt the Innocent*. Whence come Wars, and other publick Calamities, but from the Luſts of Men? Theſe break the Bands of Society, weaken and enervate every Sinew of Government, raiſe unnatural Contention, and invite foreign Invaſion; and in caſe of either, a vicious debauched People, what with the Avarice of ſome, the broken and deſperate Fortunes of others, the Diſcontent and Revenge of many, and the Careleſſneſs, Indolence, and Stupidity of more, is deprived both of Counſel and Strength, and either too weak to attempt their own Salvation, or too effeminate and cowardly to effect it. That Nations have thriven in Wealth, encreaſed in Power, and flouriſhed in Reputation and Fame, ſo long as they have continued virtuous; and declined in every thing great and good, comfortable, and valuable, as they have fallen into Debauchery and Vice, can appear from no Inſtance more remarkable, than that of *Rome*: Juſtice and Generoſity, Temperance, Frugality, and other Virtues, had exalted that Common-

wealth to the Empire of the World; but when it became infected with the Lewdneſs and Luxury of *Greece*, the Genius of that brave People was debaſed; the Love of Pleaſure diſſolved their Spirits, and conſumed their Strength; Civil Wars diſtracted them at home, and their Power hereupon declined abroad, till at length they were overthrown by the more virtuous, tho' barbarous Nations of the *North*.

2. It is an inſtituted Means.

This appears from the frequent Promiſes in Sacred Scripture, of National Bleſſings to Piety and Virtue; and National Judgments to Impiety and Vice: So *Levit.* xxvi. 3. and following Verſes; *If ye walk in my Statutes, and keep my Commandments, and do them; then I will give you Rain in due Seaſon, and the Land ſhall yield her Increaſe; and ye ſhall eat your Bread to the full, and dwell in your Land ſafely; and I will give Peace in the Land, and ye ſhall lie down, and none ſhall make you afraid; and I will rid evil Beaſts out of the Land; neither ſhall the Sword go through the Land; and ye ſhall chaſe your Enemies, and they ſhall fall before you by the Sword; and I will have Reſpect unto you, and eſtabliſh my Covenant with you, and ſet my Tabernacle among ſt you; and I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye ſhall be my People.* Here you have a fair Catalogue of the Bleſſings promiſed to *Iſrael*, as the Reward of their Duty and Obedience to God, and his Laws; *viz.* Plenty of the Fruits of the Earth; Peace at home, and Victory in Wars abroad; an Increaſe of People; Preſervation from Things hurtful; the Favour of God, and the Tokens of his Preſence, and the Grace of his Covenant, as the Sweetneſs and Security of all their Happineſs:

Happineſs: But in caſe of wilful and obſtinate Sin they are very ſeverely threatned, and a very black Catalogue of National Judgments is ſet before them, as the certain Conſequence of it; God himſelf (they are told) would be againſt them; the whole Creation would make War upon them; Diſeaſes would conſume their Inhabitants, and Famine their Land; the Sword of the Enemy would deſtroy many, and drive the reſt into fenced Cities, and there the Peſtilence would ſeize ſuch as had eſcaped the Sword; or if any eſcaped both, then Captivity would be their Lot, and Diſperſion among the Heathen: ℣. 14. *If ye will not hearken unto me, and do all theſe Commandments, if ye ſhall deſpiſe my Statutes, and your Soul abhor my Judgments, I alſo will do this unto you, I will appoint over you Terror, Conſumption, and the burning Ague; ye ſhall ſow your Seed in vain, for your Enemies ſhall eat it; ye ſhall be ſlain before your Enemies; they that hate you ſhall reign over you, and ye ſhall flee when none purſueth you: And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, then I will puniſh you ſeven times more for your Sins; and I will break the Pride of your Power; and I will make your Heaven as Iron, and your Earth as Braſs, and your Strength ſhall be ſpent in vain, for your Land ſhall not yield her Increaſe: And I will bring a Sword upon you, that ſhall avenge the Quarrel of my Covenant; and when ye are gathered together within your Cities, I will ſend the Peſtilence among you; and ye ſhall be delivered into the Hand of the Enemy.* Thus muſt thoſe who had ſinned together fall together; and having firſt increaſed one another's Guilt, muſt next increaſe one another's Fear, and Shame, and Miſery.

I MIGHT turn you farther to the xxviiith Chapter of *Deuteronomy*, where you have the Bleſſings of Obedience, and the Curſes of Diſobedience ſet over againſt each other: *If thou wilt hearken diligently to the Voice of the* LORD *thy* GOD, *to obſerve and do all his Commandments which I command thee this Day, the* LORD *thy* GOD *will ſet thee on high above all Nations of the Earth, and all theſe Bleſſings ſhall come upon thee; bleſſed ſhalt thou be in the City, and bleſſed ſhalt thou be in the Field; bleſſed ſhall be the Fruit of thy Body, and the Fruit of thy Ground, and the Fruit of thy Cattle; bleſſed ſhall be thy Baſket, and thy Store; bleſſed ſhalt thou be when thou comeſt in, and bleſſed ſhalt thou be when thou goeſt out,* &c. Ver. 15. See the whole Ch. *But it ſhall come to paſs, if thou wilt not hearken unto the Voice of the* LORD *thy* GOD, *to obſerve to do all his Commandments and Statutes which I command thee this Day, then all theſe Curſes ſhall come upon thee, and overtake thee; curſed ſhalt thou be in the City, and curſed ſhalt thou be in the Field; curſed ſhall be thy Baſket, and thy Store; curſed ſhall be the Fruit of thy Body, and the Fruit of thy Land, the Increaſe of thy Kine, and the Flocks of thy Sheep; curſed ſhalt thou be when thou comeſt in, and curſed ſhalt thou be when thou goeſt out,* &c.

AND though temporal Bleſſings, as the Reward of Piety and Virtue, were chiefly promis'd under the Old Teſtament, yet the New one is not wholly ſilent upon this Head, there you are directed *to ſeek firſt the Kingdom of* GOD, *and his Righteouſneſs*, and aſſured that ſo doing, *all other Things ſhall be added*; again it Matt. vi. 33.

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is demanded by the Apoſtle, *if* GOD *be for Us, who can be againſt Us?* We are likewiſe aſſur'd, that if we belong to GOD, *all things are Ours*; and told by the ſame Apoſtle, *that Godlineſs is profitable to all Things; having the Promiſe of the Life that now is, and that which is to come.*

Rom. viii. 31.

1 Cor. iii. 21.

1 Tim. iv. 8.

AND GOD, who is ever faithful to his Word and Covenant, has plainly in the courſe of his Providence, either granted or ſuſpended his Favour, either increas'd and built up, or broken down and deſtroy'd, Nations and Communities, according as they have been virtuous or vicious, pious or profane. The Hiſtory of the Jewiſh Common-wealth, contain'd in the two Books of *Kings*, is a very great Confirmation of this; it begins at the Cloſe of *David*'s Reign, and goes down to the *Babyloniſh* Captivity, which was the ſpace of above four hundred Years, in all which Time they were a happy or an unhappy People, as they were holy or unholy; when they obeyed the Voice of the Lord, and kept cloſe to him in the way of their Duty, he bleſs'd and proſper'd them; and when they departed from him and were diſobedient, he made them feel the Smart of his Rod; this therefore may be conſidered as an hiſtorical Confirmation of this Truth, that Piety and Virtue will preſerve a Nation, and Impiety and Vice will ruin and deſtroy it.

BUT if it ſhould be ſaid, ſuppoſe a Nation to be generally impious and corrupt, and there be but a few only whoſe Hearts tremble at GOD's Word, and who take upon them to become humble Interceſſors for their unhappy Country, what may be expected in that Caſe? I anſwer with

with *Eliphaz* in my Text, GOD for their ſakes will probably preſerve and deliver the guilty: He would have ſpared all the Inhabitants of *Sodom*, had ten righteous Perſons been found there; and as it was, GOD went on granting, till *Abraham* left off aſking; nay if there ſhould be none righteous, yet if GOD's Word or Providence makes a ſinful People penitent, then their Repentance, which is initial Piety, ſhall be accepted; thus *Nineveh* that great City was ſpared, though their Deſtruction was poſitively threatned, and the Time of it fixed by the Word of GOD: Nay in the inſtance of *Ahab*, we find that even external Humiliation may procure a Suſpenſion of Judgment; if it be ſincere Repentance, GOD will revoke the Sentence of Wrath, and if it be but external, yet foraſmuch as it gives ſome Glory to GOD, he will be ſo good as to ſuſpend the Execution of his Sentence, and grant a Reprieve; this is ſo much the more remarkable, as *Ahab* is ſaid to *have ſold himſelf to work Wickedneſs, and to have done very abominably*. GOD will never have it ſaid that he is unmerciful, he is more ready to ſhew Mercy than Sinners are to aſk it; Judgment was always his ſtrange Work, and every Age of the World has Reaſon to ſay with his People of old, *Who is a* GOD *like unto thee, that pardoneth Iniquity that paſſeth by the Tranſgreſſion of the Remnant of thy Heritage; who retaineſt not thine Anger for ever, becauſe thou delighteſt in Mercy?* Mich. vii. 18.

1 Kings xxi. 25, 26.

THE Application of this Subject now follows.

1. IT appears from hence, that Wickedneſs and wicked Men, are the Miſchief and Miſery of a Nation.

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SIN is the black Fountain, from whence proceed the many Streams of publick and national Misery, and Sinners the cruel Hands which draw down Confusion and Mischief on themselves and others. GOD for this Cause gave *Jacob* to the Spoil, and *Israel* to the Robbers, made the Heaven as Brass, and the Earth as Iron, delivered their Sons to the Sword, and their Daughters to Captivity; hence comes the Curse of GOD and Destruction upon a Nation, the loss of all that is Good, and the too just fear of all that is Evil; hence are the Desolations that are made in the Earth, the Cries of the Oppress'd, and the Groans of the Miserable; rampant and uncontrouled Lusts, the Blasphemy, Lewdness and Debauchery, which revel in the Streets and Markets, and spread through the several Ranks and Orders of Men, these blast the Reputation of a Nation, strike down her Credit and Power, devour her Wealth, stop up the Channels of Trade, involve all things in Confusion, and give her over to Oppression and Misery; they are the Men who ruin their Country, *That draw Iniquity with the Cords of Vanity, and Sin as it were with a Cart Rope*; the common Swearers and Drunkards, lewd, unclean, malicious, false and lying People, are a common Nusance, and the publick Mischief of a Nation: And when we hear of the dark Assemblies of the wicked, where they tempt one another to Evil, and strengthen themselves in Iniquity, whither heedless Youth are enticed, and Persons of good Education, who till then perhaps were virtuous and sober, and as to the grosser Acts of Sin, at least unstain'd, where Immorality is encouraged upon Principles of Infidelity, and People are taught to deride things

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ſacred, that they may ſin without a trembling and miſgiving Heart; where every ſenſual Appetite is indulged, and all things rational and virtuous are drown'd in Muſick and Liquor; outragious Laughter and unmanly Mirth; where the Night is conſum'd in Deeds more dark than it ſelf, and the Day breaks upon them without Shame; when the Iniquity perpetrated in ſuch Places, is carried out from thence into all Quarters, ſpreading like a Deluge, and feebly if at all oppos'd, you preſently perceive what are the Things, and who are the People that defile and threaten the Land.

2. THE great Abſurdity of reproaching and injuring righteous People.

THESE, tho' by Inclination and Principle uſeful and peaceable, are yet often ill uſed by the wicked: *They who will live godly in* CHRIST JESUS *muſt ſuffer Perſecution*; if by the Favour of GOD they eſcape the ungodly Deeds, yet they ſeldom come off without the hard Speeches of the prophane and profligate, among whom they dwell: *Puritan* was formerly a Term of Reproach, and now, I fear, *Saint* is a Name given by ſome in a way of Deriſion, as if it were not enough that People are wicked themſelves, but they will not endure any ſhould be, at leaſt, that they ſhould be ſuppoſed and thought to be otherwiſe: But is it indeed an Accompliſhment to banter and reproach virtuous Men? Is this all that the Wit of fine Gentlemen ſerves for? Where, I wonder, is the Senſe of having a Fling at Piety, and vilifying Men that fear GOD? What occaſion have they given for abuſive Language, and impious Treatment? Who are uſeful Members of Society, if not Men of Godlineſs and Honeſty? Who

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may be relied on, if not such as are virtuous on Principle? Who are likely to be good Friends and Neighbours, if not they that exercise themselves to keep a Conscience void of Offence? And if it be true that God often spares a Nation for the sake of a few good People in it, to injure such is a great Absurdity; it is as if Men should destroy their own Foundations, and dig away the Ground on which they should stand. But it was long ago observed, that *the Upright in the Way is an Abomination to the Wicked*; and, *As he that was born after the Flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.* This, however, should neither provoke nor discourage good People; a conscious Integrity, and the Honour to have Power with God, will carry such thro' any Opposition, and ever so much Reproach; what is the wry Mouth of the Scorner, where there is the Favour of GOD, and the Smiles of his Countenance? *Let them curse*, says he, *but bless thou:* No matter for the Reproaches of Men, if there be but Acceptance with God. This can be no real Hurt to the Righteous, and is one of the many Absurdities in the Behaviour of the Wicked; and shews the great Propriety of Sacred Writ, where *Fool* and *Sinner* are but different Names for the same Person.

Prov. xxix. 27. Gal. iv. 29. Psal. cix. 28.

3. WHAT a Motive and Encouragement is this to Piety and Virtue?

REAL Goodness is not only a personal Advantage, but a publick and national Blessing; it is a natural and the instituted Means of Preservation and Deliverance: This, were it but general, would secure to us the Favour of God,

make us ſtrong *as a fenced City, and terrible as an Army with Banners:* We need not then *be afraid for the Terror by Night, nor for the Arrow that flieth by Day; nor for the Peſtilence that walketh in Darkneſs, nor for the Deſtruction that waſteth at Noon-day.* This would make *our Sons as Plants grown up in their Youth; and our Daughters as Corner-ſtones poliſhed after the ſimilitude of a Palace; our Garners full, affording all manner of Store; and our Sheep to bring forth thouſands and ten thouſands in our Streets; our Oxen ſtrong to labour; and that there be no breaking in, nor going out, nor complaining in our Streets.* Beſides that good People are the beſt and moſt uſeful Members of Society, on account of their Uprightneſs and Honeſty; their Induſtry and Diligence; their Frugality and Temperance; their *ſtudying to be quiet, and to do their own Buſineſs; and if it be poſſible, and as much as lies in them, to live peaceably with all Men*; they are likewiſe a People who give themſelves unto Prayer, who cry unto GOD Day and Night for their Native Country, and *give him no reſt till he eſtabliſh it, and make it a Joy, and a Praiſe in the Earth.* They are a real Bleſſing to the Age and Place where they live; ill People owe their Preſervation to them, and the Community is obliged to them in no ſmall Meaſure for their Proſperity and Succeſs; if Mercy be procured it is very much through their Means; if a Storm ariſes, they are moſt likely to ſcatter and diſperſe it; and when God has a Controverſy with the Land, they muſt be inſtrumental to make it up: The great Honour which GOD puts upon good People, appears

Pſal. xci. 5, 6.

Pſal. cxliv. 12—14.

from

from the many Instances upon Record of the Virtue and Power of Prayer, every one of which encourages them to believe this, and obliges them to continue instant in it; YOU, Sirs, who fear the Name of GOD, are the People to whom he looks, and from whom he expects to hear continually: Your Religion obliges you to honour GOD, to be charitable and useful to Men, and *to put on Bowels of Compassion* to your bleeding Country; you know there are many Abominations committed in the Land, see you to it that there be some holy Perfume ascending up unto Heaven from every Quarter; there are Oaths and Curses uttered in every Place, enough to infect the Air, as well as provoke the Anger of God; let there be also Prayers, Supplications, and Intercessions offered up at the same time, *to enter into the Ears of the* LORD *of Sabbaoth: Ye are the Salt of the Earth, and the Light of the World*; GOD would make quick Work with Sinners, were it not for the Remnant of the Righteous, who dwell among them: As they dishonour GOD, you should honour him; as they blaspheme, you should pray; as they maintain the Devil's Interest, you should assert and vindicate GOD's; and the more is done by such to draw down the Wrath of GOD, so much the more should be done by you, to restrain that Wrath, and to draw down his Pity and Mercy: This you should do, because God has a manifest Regard to your sincere Piety, and humble incessant Prayer; his Eye is upon you, and his Hand works for you; by this means you deliver your own Souls, give the warmest Evidence of your Zeal for GOD, and the sincerest Proof of your

Compaſſion to the Bodies and Souls of Men; moreover, your Inſtrumentality in the Preſervation of others, may be improved as a Pledge of your own future eternal Salvation. And finally, now only is the Time, and this World only is the Place, in which you can deliver others; hereafter in the Great Day your Purity and Innocence will avail for your ſelves only; then no Man, however good, or Number of Men, however pure, can redeem their Neighbours, or their Brethren, or give to GOD a Ranſom for them.

I CONCLUDE with obſerving,

4. THE Reaſon and Uſefulneſs of theſe Societies.

IF Religion and Virtue be the Safety and Glory of a Nation, and Irreligion and Vice its Reproach and Miſery; then doubtleſs whatever is a proper Means of promoting the one, and of diſcouraging and ſuppreſſing the other, ought to be attempted and purſued. That THESE SOCIETIES are a proper Means of doing this, may appear to any conſiderate Perſon: The End they propoſe is the Honour of GOD, the Safety and Happineſs of the Nation, and the Reformation of vile and ſcandalous Sinners; the Means they uſe, is, the regular Execution of thoſe Laws the Wiſdom of the Nation has deliberately enacted; and the Motives by which they are urged to this pious and charitable Work, they can appeal to all Men, are not worldly and ſecular Advantage, much leſs private Revenge, or a buſy intermeddling with other Peoples Matters; but a Zeal for God and Goodneſs, a Hatred of Sin and Wickedneſs, a Deſire of Publick Order, and a Dread of national

tional Confuſion, and common Calamity, the natural and unavoidable Conſequence of abounding Impiety, and unreſtrained Vice: Lower Views than theſe, would not, I think, ſupport and encourage their Undertaking, which I am ſorry to ſay is attended with great Oppoſition and Difficulty, and in many Inſtances with no ſmall Hazard and Danger: And whoſoever conſiders the Policy and Power of the Patrons of Vice; what dear Things ſinful Gratifications are to wicked Men; how mutually the Profane and Profligate would combine together, to make a Stand againſt Reformation, and by all the Arts of Contrivance and Power of Gold, defend their infamous Liberty, and defeat this good Deſign, will ſee, that it became neceſſary for the Friends of Religion and Virtue to aſſociate, and form themſelves into regular Bodies, in order to ſtrengthen each others Hands, ſuſtain the Deriſion and Fury of their Enemies, and ſecure the Succeſs of their Undertaking: And now, Gentlemen of theſe Societies, I take leave to congratulate with you upon the Succeſs you have met with in this Work; and that having obtain'd help of GOD you continue to combat with bold and daring Sin; you know the World too well, to ſuppoſe yours ſhould be an eaſie Undertaking; you muſt not wonder that the prophane and licentious Multitude are againſt you to a Man, they who are ſo ignorant and hardned as to call *Evil Good, and Good Evil*; *to put Darkneſs for Light, and Light for Darkneſs*; who call it good Breeding to Swear, good Fellowſhip to be Drunk, and Gallantry to be Lewd and Unclean, they, no doubt, will endeavour to defame you, miſrepreſent your Actions, ſpeak all manner of Evil

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of you falsely, and if it should be in their Power, insult and abuse your Persons; nor must you be discouraged if you are not always supported, where you might reasonably expect Support; it is to be feared you will find, in some who should be your Friends, a culpable Indolence, and in others a cold Neutrality; but still you must go on with your pious Design; the Laws of GOD and your Country are with you; you began under the auspicious Influence of the best of QUEENS, and you are now encouraged by our present gracious KING; Magistrates in exalted Stations have own'd your Cause, and done you the Honour to Countenance your prudent, just and legal Prosecutions; you have the Prayers of all good Men for you, and the Consciences even of the wicked are on your side: Fear not therefore to challenge the boldest Sinner, inform against those who defy the Laws of GOD and Men, scorning the unjust Reproach of the Scornful, let the Mercies of GOD to your Country, excite you to express your Thankfulness to him, by attempting a farther Reformation of Manners; and the Judgments of GOD, which are gone forth into the Earth, quicken your Zeal; the continuance of the Plague in a neighbouring Nation, and its being hitherto restrain'd from this, is a double Motive to you, to prosecute daring Impiety, to pursue and search out secret Wickedness, and make those vile, lewd, disorderly Creatures afraid of Punishment, who can't be made asham'd of Sin: And give me leave to add, while you reprove and chastise others, take, I beseech you, the greatest heed to your selves; be sure that you be Men of clean Hands and a pure Heart;

Piety,

Piety, Prudence, Integrity and Circumſpection cannot be too much inculcated upon you, many Eyes watch, and wiſh for your halting, a Miſtake on your part, will be magnified into a high Crime, and any Miſcarriage among you exceedingly diſſerve the Cauſe you profeſs to eſpouſe; it has been your Honour to approve your Virtue in the ſight of Men, and that your Enemies have not been able to convince you of the Sins they were glad to lay to your Charge; nevertheleſs, ſuch as you and I ſhould take it well, to be reminded of ſuch a warm Expoſtulation as that of the Apoſtle: *Thou that teacheſt another, teacheſt thou not thy ſelf? Thou that preacheſt a Man ſhould not ſteal, doſt thou ſteal? Thou that ſayeſt a Man ſhould not commit Adultery, doſt thou commit Adultery? Thou that abhorreſt Idols, doſt thou commit Sacrilege? Thou that makeſt thy boaſt of the Law, through breaking the Law, diſhonoureſt thou God?* This would be highly unſuitable to your Deſign, unworthy your Character, and very abſurd. He will be an improper Perſon to pluck a Mote out of his Brother's Eye, who has a Beam in his own: We all know the mighty Force and Power of Example, and therefore nothing is more to be wiſh'd, than that Magiſtrates, Miniſters, and the Reformers of others, ſhould be themſelves ſtrictly virtuous, and exemplarily good: *Only let your own Converſation be ſuch as becomes the Goſpel of* CHRIST; your Endeavour to reform others, proceed from an apparent Deſire of their preſent and future Welfare, your Informations againſt their Crimes prudent and juſt, and your Proſecutions timely and impartial; and GOD will

Rom. ii. 21, 22, 23.

will bleſs you, and it is to be hop'd you will be ſupported and aſſiſted by the Advice of ſome, the Power and Authority of others, the Purſes of many, and the Prayers of all Men, who tender the Honour of GOD Almighty, and ſincerely wiſh the Safety and Happineſs of the KING and Kingdom.

FINIS.